

THE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE NETWORK

VIOLENCE, THE BODY, AND THE CITY

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Room 1, The Wolfson Exchange, The Library, University of Warwick

ABSTRACTS

Colin Rose (Brock University) crose@brocku.ca

'Bodies of Evidence: Suspicious Death and Homicide in Early Modern Bologna'

How did early modern authorities identify a homicide? The officers of the criminal court in Bologna had many opportunities to practice. Bolognese officials looked at both the body and the city to declare a death a homicide. Bologna's elite medical school made the city a leader in anatomy and its doctors were called upon as medical examiners in the service of judicial authorities. A medical examination was the first step in determining whether a death was a homicide. Many of these cases were obvious: stab wounds, gun shots, broken skulls. But how did investigators make this determination when the nature of the death was not obvious? In cases such as poisonings, drownings and falls, Bolognese investigators examined the spatial and social context of bodies as well, and the city itself became an element of their analysis. The location and identity of a body could be equally germane as its wounds.

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""Right hand, neck and limbs"": Capital Executions as Degradation Rituals in Early Modern Venice'

Historiography has paid much attention to the complex moment of public executions organised by ancient regime's societies, an interest sparked by Foucault's reflections on the body of the prisoners and its political and symbolic values. As far as the Republic of Venice is concerned, Ruggiero already suggested that public quartering was to be considered as a public retaliation meant to reconstruct the socio-political order, broken by the crime committed. Through an historical and anthropological approach, this presentation will suggest a more comprehensive interpretation of capital executions in early modern Venice by taking into consideration three different stages: the prisoner sentenced to death was, first, expelled from civil and civic life, second, from the human world and, third, from the living kingdom. In each phase of this ritual degradation every damage inflicted to the body reflected a figurative shift, thus suggesting the cultural values attributed to certain body parts, such as the right hand, neck and limbs.

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'The Body Flayed Bare in Early Modern Visual Culture'

As a means of torture, flaying is an extreme inscription of both pain and power. There are 108 known and extant representations of the myth of Apollo and Marsyas from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, yet this fascination with the

skin's removal as a site of violence and suffering was starkly disproportionate to the reality of its occurrence during the Early Modern period. Other than one recorded example in Venice in 1570, these gruesome images – so compellingly cruel and bloody in their corporeality – have virtually no historical basis in fact. This paper will present an analytical approach to the imaginary and symbolic resonances associated with representations of flaying. In addition to examining a number of different interpretive frameworks and broader cultural appropriations associated with the Marsyas myth in art, I propose that the distressing nature of Gerard David's *The Flaying of Sisamnes*, produced in 1498 for the town hall in Bruges may have generated a range of allegorical or exemplary civic and social functions relating to social justice and human discovery.

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'The King's Two Bodies and the Urban Environment in Seventeenth Century Spain'

In the early modern era legal speculations were still related to theological thought, or, to be more specific, to the medieval concept of the king's *character angelicus*. The body politic of kinship appears as a likeness of the "holy sprites and angels" because it represents the Immutable within Time. To explain the theory of the King's Two Bodies it may be appropriate to choose as a starting point Edmund Plowden's *Commentaries or Reports*, himself a law apprentice of the Middle Temple. In the *cause célèbre* concerning the Duchy of Lancaster, the crown lawyers, assembled at Serjeant's Inn, all agreed:

that by the Common Law no Act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his Nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.⁸

Separating the Body natural from the state's body politic resolved definitively the perils of a ritual violence in the City implicit in the *interregnum*, the existential agony caused by the loss of the leader. We aim at studying the logical consequences of this distinction in seventeenth century Spain, tragic but necessary for the formation of the modern state, and how these were shaped by the urban environment.

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'Madness and Violence: Dealing with the Violent Mad in Amsterdam 1600-1800'

A notarial document from 1707 tells the story about the mad Albert van Herden. His aggressive and violent behaviour caused great problems in his household and neighbourhood. Albert bothered his neighbours and people on the street on a daily

basis. Attacking them without reason, calling them names and threatening to run his sword through them. But this was not all he also threatened to kill his wife and children during his fits of rage, and chased them out of the house at all hours of the night which made it impossible for them to keep living under the same roof as Albert.

This example is not an exceptional story and multiple sources tells us stories about the dangerous violent situations that were created in the private but also in the public space by the mad. Madness and violence -both physical and verbal- often time went hand in hand and caused great challenges for the urban communities. In this paper I would like to discuss how this violent behaviour of the mad was dealt with in early modern Amsterdam and reflect on how these reactions differed in the public and private space.

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'A Radical Ecstasy: The Judaizing Female Body during the Spanish Inquisition'

'There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one,' claims Walter Benjamin. 'Our coming was expected on earth.'¹ This paper focusses specifically on the concept of 'radicalisation', investigating how the Judaizing female body of the late Medieval period intersects with the contemporary radicalized female body. The Inquisition was set up to root out and condemn 'Judaizers', those converts who were not fully assimilated Christians. Also at this time however, many assimilated converts revived their Jewish roots because they were rejected and castigated as Christians. In this paper, I explore how this process of 'radicalisation' is *felt* and trace its path from the violence of social isolation to the violence of immolation.

This is a 'creative-critical' analysis. It is written in essay form and is interspersed with 'messages' from the dead. These messages depict the inner consciousness of a young converted Christian woman who comes of age in Seville, during the Inquisition. It maps the process of her 'radicalisation', which comes in the form of her emergence as both a Jew and a 'prophetess', one who also communes with God through voices of the dead.

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'Ritual Violence and Collective Identity during the Reapers' Revolt (1640)'

This paper aims at examining the violence perpetrated during the Reapers' Revolt in Barcelona in 1640. On the 7th June 1640, the day of Corpus Christi, a rebellion broke out in Barcelona. Since 1635, in the Thirty Years' War context, the Spanish *Tercios* had been causing trouble in Catalonia, forced to lodge them. The population blamed the viceroy for the soldiers' lootings of homes and churches, a tension that reached its highest point with his death during the revolt.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York: Schocken Books, 2007, p.254.

Through the analysis of a series of primary sources, I will demonstrate that this riot was not an expression of uncontrolled rage, but an uprising which followed very clear steps and goals. Through collective violence against bodies and belongings, the population intended to delegitimize the authority of the viceroy. This ritual violence and the appropriation of the public space were the means to legitimize the uprising and to reassert their damaged Catholic identity.

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'Prisoners and Towns in the 18th Century. Another Conflict Space'

In a war, populations can be affected by both the armed clashes themselves and their consequences, affecting in both cases the urban nucleus, either by its possible physical changes in them by the struggle, as by the reorganization of their routine and buildings, enabled to the different urgencies and necessities of the moment. At this point, taking and caring for prisoners of war in the 18th century is a very important aspect that affected such factors. We intend to approach this phenomenon by focusing on aspects such as the taking of prisoners in the struggle lived in urban centres, how they were cared for and housed, affecting the civilian population, and their impact on buildings and population infrastructures.